

Research Behind the Initiative

Research played a critical role in enriching the development of the *It All Adds Up to Cleaner Air* initiative. A variety of secondary and primary research was conducted, including a comprehensive review of literature on transportation and air quality public education programs, focus groups, pilot testing and a demonstration phase.

Literature Review. An extensive review of national and regional/local public education programs on transportation and air quality, and public education programs to modify behavior, identified a need for a national program flexible enough to be tailored at the local level. Many national, local and regional organizations already had transportation and air quality public education programs. However, the findings indicated a need for this campaign's messages to focus more on traffic congestion and quality of life—meaningful issues for the target groups—in addition to health issues.

Stakeholder Groups. Moderated discussion groups with potential stakeholders revealed insights into the challenges and potential obstacles of a national transportation and air quality initiative. The sessions included representatives from four stakeholder groups: industry, states, metropolitan planning organizations, and associations and nongovernmental organizations. These groups said:

- State and local transportation planners and air quality regulators need help in meeting their congestion and air quality objectives under the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) and the Clean Air Act (CAA).
- Transportation and air quality organizations have limited resources to meet these goals.
- Past public education messages about transportation and air quality issues at the state and local levels were inconsistent and confusing.
- The messages need to be acceptable to consumers and the stakeholders who will fund their dissemination.

Target Audience Research. To identify segments of the general public most amenable to changing their transportation behaviors to improve air quality, U.S. DOT and U.S. EPA first reviewed research on people's

transportation habits and their attitudes and behaviors toward the environment. These studies included *The Environment: Public Attitudes and Individual Behavior* (a long-term study of consumer attitudes and behaviors related to the environment by the Roper Organization, Inc.), the Mediamark Research, Inc. Index (syndicated market research on purchasing behaviors, categorized by demographics and media used) and additional regional/state quantitative and qualitative research.

The data analysis suggested further study of people who might be willing to change their transportation habits in order to improve air quality.

Next, we held focus groups to gain insights into transportation and air quality issues affecting the general public, which helped to identify key issues and potential communication strategies for developing the education initiative. These groups revealed the following:

- Citizens do not understand the link between transportation choices and air quality.
- Citizens are largely unaware of the available range of alternatives to solo driving.
- Air quality and transportation are typically not high-priority issues for citizens.
- Citizens feel that government and industry should share responsibility for improving air quality and congestion.

Thus, the target audience for *It All Adds Up to Cleaner Air* became “members of the general driving public who recognize that air pollution is a problem and feel that they personally can make a difference.” They are aware of environmental issues and believe that individuals can reduce air pollution caused by automobile exhaust. This segment is primarily college-educated and middle-class.

Concept and Message Testing. The next round of focus groups revealed that many people do not see environmental benefits as a convincing reason to change their behaviors and indicated that other benefits were much more relevant. The strategy, therefore, shifted to targeting the general driving public and, secondarily, those for whom environmental benefits would weigh into their transportation choices. The participants revealed the following:

- They were not blind to their area's environmental challenges, but other problems had higher priority.

- They were aware of alternatives to driving alone.
- They believed they were already taking steps to improve local air quality.

Literature Review and Market Research Overarching Summary.

- Transportation and air quality stakeholders have identified a need to educate citizens about the effect of individual transportation choices on air quality and congestion.
- Organizations would greatly benefit from sharing expertise, messages and tools designed to educate citizens.
- A national public education effort implemented at the local level would allow:
 - personal interaction with the target audience at the local level
 - broader dissemination of messages
 - positioning of transportation and air quality issues as a national priority.
- Messages about air quality and congestion should:
 - have a credible rationale
 - stress the voluntary aspect of individual action
 - be encouraging and positive in tone and substance
 - suggest simple and convenient options
 - speak to both consumers and organizations.

Pilot Phase

In 1997-98, the federal partners coordinated with three communities to introduce the federally sponsored *It All Adds Up to Cleaner Air* public education campaign. One of the nation's largest metropolitan areas, San Francisco, California, a medium-sized city, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and Dover, Delaware, a small community just starting to address transportation and air quality issues, were selected as pilot sites. Each site collaborated with community groups, businesses and environmental organizations to implement and sustain the program within their communities.

The pilot phase included a comprehensive evaluation that tracked implementation of the pilot program, including community activities, use of the media, the initiative's impact on the public and recommendations for improvements, including how the federal partners could best support existing efforts and pass along successful community strategies. Community activities were found to have supported the initiative's objectives of increasing awareness of the relationship between transportation programs and services, air quality and congestion.

Pilot phase findings provided valuable insights into continuing development of a national initiative which could meet the needs of a diverse array of communities, and laid the foundation for a sustainable effort to motivate Americans to change their transportation habits.

Key findings from the pilot phase included the following:

- Community participation was pivotal to developing and refining the national initiative.
- Many strategies selected by communities reflected overarching themes, while other approaches were tailored to specific local needs or expertise.
- As expected, the initiative's effect on the general driving public was limited to changes in awareness.

Key lessons learned from the pilot phase encouraged the federal partners to refine and expand the program to support 14 demonstration communities and make initiative materials available to 90 additional communities in 34 states.

Demonstration Communities

From May 1999 through October 2000, 14 selected demonstration communities used the *It All Adds Up to Cleaner Air* concepts, approaches and high-quality materials—incrementally refined following pilot testing—and adapted them for their specific purposes. The intent of this phase was to demonstrate how *It All Adds Up* materials and strategies could be modified and incorporated into ongoing outreach and partnership-building efforts across the country. Lessons learned and products developed are now being shared with other communities with similar air quality and congestion issues and demographics.

“First Five Years” Evaluation

To document the program's progress, a “First Five Years” evaluation was conducted. The results showed the value of varied approaches and, more importantly, highlighted the need to maintain flexibility in material development and use. Demonstration communities proved the benefits of having diverse materials, as reflected in the rich creativity of their individual approaches.

